

**WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:**

1. A towed raft comprising: a receiving area substantially defined laterally by a generally U-shaped floating frame having an open end, and upwardly by a spine and rib assembly connected to said frame, said receiving area being configured to receive a marine vessel therein substantially through said open end, said receiving area having a longitudinal centerline, said assembly comprising a spine upwardly spaced from said frame and substantially aligned with said longitudinal centerline, and a plurality of ribs connecting said spine to said frame, said ribs extending generally outwardly and downwardly from said spine, and at least one lifting device secured to said spine to said frame, said lifting device adapted to lift, lower and retain said marine vessel relative to said receiving area.

2. The towed raft of Claim 1 wherein said U-shaped floating framed comprises a pair of spaced apart floats connected by a cross brace at a forward end of said frame opposite said open end.

3. The towed raft of Claim 2 wherein said floats are substantially parallel, said longitudinal centerline being generally equidistant between said floats.

4. The towed raft of Claim 2 further comprising a tow winch secured to said cross brace, said winch adapted to tow said marine vessel into position for recovering said marine vessel by said lifting device.

5. The towed raft of Claim 1 wherein said lifting device retains said marine vessel within said receiving area with clearance of an underside of said marine vessel above the level of water in which said apparatus floats between about 10 inches and about 30 inches.

6. The towed raft of Claim 1 wherein said assembly comprises at least two pairs of ribs, each said pair comprising ribs extending generally outwardly and downwardly from said spine from generally opposite sides of said spine.

7. The towed raft of Claim 6 wherein one said lifting device is provided on said spine corresponding to each said pair of ribs.

8. The towed raft of Claim 1 wherein each said lifting device comprises a cable having a hook at a distal end thereof and having a connected end wound about a reel, said reel having operative controls for winding and unwinding said cable.

9. The towed raft of Claim 8 wherein said operative controls comprise a manual winch.

10. The towed raft of Claim 8 wherein said operative controls comprise at least one hydraulic lift cylinder.

11. The towed raft of Claim 8 wherein said operative controls comprise a motorized winch.

12. The towed raft of Claim 8 wherein each said lifting device is mounted within said spine, said cable and said distal end extending generally downwardly from said spine.

13. The towed raft of Claim 1 wherein said frame has a length of between about 25 feet and about 40 feet.

14. The towed raft of Claim 13 wherein said length is about 33 ½ feet.

15. The towed raft of Claim 1 wherein said frame has a width of between about 8 feet and about 15 feet.

16. The towed raft of Claim 15 wherein said width is about 12 ½ feet.

17. The towed raft of Claim 1 wherein said frame and said assembly have a dry-dock height of between about 6 feet and about 15 feet.

18. The towed raft of Claim 17 wherein said dry-dock height is about 8 ¾ feet.

19. The towed raft of Claim 1 further comprising a battery stored power source for operating said lifting device.

20. The towed raft of Claim 19 wherein said battery-stored power source has a power storage capacity sufficient for at least 2 repetitions of a set of lowering and lifting said marine vessel.

21. The towed raft of Claim 1 wherein each said lifting device is adapted to raise and lower loads of up to about 7500 pounds.

22. The towed raft Claim 1 adapted to be towed at speeds up to about 18 knots with said marine vessel retained within said receiving area.

23. The towed raft of Claim 1 wherein said marine vessel comprises a swimmer delivery vehicle.

24. The towed raft of Claim 23 wherein said swimmer delivery vehicle has a passenger capacity of between 2 and 10.

25. The towed raft of Claim 2 wherein each said float comprises a hull manufactured of aluminum.

26. The towed raft of Claim 2 wherein each said float comprises a hull manufactured of fiberglass.

27. The towed raft of Claim 2 wherein each said float comprises a pontoon hull float.

28. The towed raft of Claim 2 wherein each said float comprises a catamaran hull float.

29. The towed raft of Claim 2 wherein each said float comprises a substantially flat upper surface adapted for occupancy by at least one crew member.

30. The towed raft of Claim 29 wherein each said flat upper surface has an inside perimeter and an outside perimeter, said inside perimeter being adjacent said receiving area, said towed raft further comprising at least one generally upstanding railing extending substantially along said inside perimeter of each said float.

31. The towed raft of Claim 30 further comprising at least one generally upstanding railing extending along at least one portion of said outside perimeter.

32. The towed raft of Claim 1 further comprising mechanical means for propelling said towed raft along a body of water.

33. The towed raft of Claim 32 wherein said mechanical means for propelling comprises either a marine outboard motor, a water jet motor or a diesel motor operatively connected to a propeller assembly.

34. The towed raft of Claim 32 further comprising steering means for navigating said towed raft.

35. The towed raft of Claim 34 wherein said steering means is mounted at a forward end of said towed raft opposite said open end.

36. The towed raft of Claim 1 wherein said frame and said assembly define said receiving area having a volumetric capacity of between about 720 cubic feet and about 5,760 cubic feet.

37. The towed raft of Claim 36 wherein said capacity is about 1,344 cubic feet.

38. The towed raft of Claim 6 wherein each said pair comprises a generally arched construction connecting said spine to said frame.

39. The towed raft of Claim 1 wherein said spine comprises a generally longitudinal beam spaced above said frame, said ribs extending

generally outwardly and downwardly from said beam on laterally opposite sides thereof to said frame.

40. The towed raft of Claim 39 wherein each said lifting device is mounted to the underside of said beam.

41. The towed raft of Claim 39 further comprising a plurality of rigid support elements secured to said beam generally adjacent each said lifting device, said rigid support elements being adapted for providing structural support to said beam during use of said lifting devices.

42. The towed raft of Claim 8 further comprising a control panel operatively connected to said operative control for each said lifting device, said control panel having a plurality of controllers mounted thereon for selectively extending and retracting said cable.

43. The towed raft of Claim 2 wherein said cross brace comprises a rigid sheet extending between said floats and secured to said floats generally at opposite ends of said sheet.

44. The towed raft of Claim 1 further comprising at least one tow-line connection point secured generally at a forward end of said frame opposite said open end.

45. The towed raft of Claim 2 further comprising a pair of tow-line connection points, one and the other said connection points being secured on one and the other said floats, respectively, generally at opposite ends of said cross brace.

46. The towed raft of Claim 44 or Claim 45 wherein each said connection point is configured to receive a distal connector from a tow line extending rearwardly from a tow craft.

47. The towed raft of Claim 1 wherein said receiving area has a height through said longitudinal centerline of between about 6 feet and about 12 feet.

48. The towed raft of Claim 47 wherein said height is about 8 feet.

49. The towed raft of Claim 1 wherein said receiving area has a width defined by said frame of between about 8 feet and about 15 feet.

50. The towed raft of Claim 49 wherein said width is about 8 feet.

51. The towed raft of Claim 1 wherein said receiving area has a length from a forward end within said frame to said open end of between about 15 feet and about 32 feet.

52. The towed raft of Claim 51 wherein said length is about 28 feet.

53. The towed raft of Claim 1 wherein said receiving area has a height through said longitudinal centerline of about 8 feet, a width defined by said frame of about 8 feet, and a length from a forward end within said frame to said open end of about 28 feet.